
28TH CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF EU PAYING AGENCIES

Namur, 27 - 29 October 2010

Statement from Minister Lutgen represented by Mr. Claude Delbeuck,
Director General of the Directorate-General for Agriculture, Natural
Resources and the Environment and Head of the Wallonia Paying
Agency

The Federal Minister for Agriculture,

Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of the Commission,

The representative of the French Court of Audit,

Director Generals,

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the national delegations and dear colleagues,

Mr. Benoît Lutgen, the Minister for Agriculture for the Walloon region, had intended to welcome you and launch the work to be carried out at this Conference. However, at the same time a meeting of the Council of Regional Ministers is taking place which prevents him from being here today. Therefore he has asked me to present his apologies and welcome you, in his name, to the 28th Conference of Directors of European Paying Agencies, and I am delighted to do so. In particular, he would have liked to have told you how very proud he is to welcome this prestigious event to Namur, the capital of the Walloon region and how he wishes you all a pleasant, fruitful and productive stay.

The Walloon region

At the time of the previous Belgian presidency, this same conference, the 11th had been invited in October 2001 to Bruges, a beautiful city indeed, in the Flemish region. This time, the Walloon region is organising this event. It seemed to me essential that this Conference should take place at the heart of the regional capital, whose famous citadel the majority of you were doubtless able to visit yesterday.

The Flemish community has however taken care of the organisation of the 38th Panta Rhei Conference, which took place in Ghent, at the beginning of this month. Our delegates have already told us that this conference was a wonderful success and

taught us many things. Our hearty congratulations to our colleagues from the North for this beautiful demonstration of efficiency.

The Walloon region is a land of hospitality and tourism, rich in rural and forested landscapes, living alongside remarkable historical heritage. These different characteristics are obviously to be taken into consideration if one wishes to develop a relevant agricultural policy in the Walloon region, in accordance with the regulatory context of the European Union.

Our vegetable and animal produce are very exposed on the worldwide market. Economic support from the first pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy is therefore still essential. Bearing in mind the characteristics of our Region, it is clear that we must pay continuous attention to the application of the regulations of the second pillar.

Our Walloon plan for rural development is therefore an essential instrument for redeploing our agriculture in the direction of economic activity which is profitable and capable of meeting the new expectations of society regarding rurality and protection of the environment.

On a European level, we are on the brink of an important reform which should redefine the CAP for the period following 2013. In this context, the Walloon region will plead in favour of maintaining a strong CAP allowing a fair income to be ensured for the producers, to support the economic function of agricultural production and ensure protection against the extreme volatility of the markets. This new CAP will have to meet the expectations of our fellow citizens and take into account environmental demands. The response to the new challenges presented in terms of global warming and the loss of biodiversity as well as integration in the EU 2020 strategy are just as much priority targets.

In this context, maintaining a structure based on 2 complementary pillars seems to us to be appropriate: the first should go back to direct aid and market management measures and the second should set up the European framework allowing measures to be developed which respond to the diverse range of European agriculture, to the specifics of the member States and their regions and finally to support the territorial dimension of agriculture.

We look forward with interest to the communication that the Commission is soon to present on this subject.

Our priorities

Regarding our priorities, we are absolutely intent upon having a Walloon Paying Agency which is reliable and effective. It is in the interest of our fellow citizens. Close attention is therefore paid to this body's activity, through actions involving audits, certification and ministerial monitoring. The latter is subject to significant modernisation, currently being led by our Administration. These actions concern instruments for managing aid applications, but also financial instruments and must rest on groups of agricultural land initially, and in the close future on groups of forested land.

Regarding the agricultural sector, a top priority that is important to us is to support the young people and to help them as far as possible in setting up and taking up farms.

For two years we have been making particular efforts regarding aid from axis 2 of the rural development plan. Our current efforts concern the modernisation of managerial instruments and our future efforts in the short term will focus on increasing the efficiency of measures on the ground.

In 2010, we brought into production the new aid system Natura 2000. This system will grow in strength in 2011.

Generally speaking, we are aiming to improve integration at all levels between measures which are typically agricultural and those in favour of the environment. Obviously, it is not straightforward, in so far as the original regulatory bases are noticeably different, and at times not necessarily compatible at least in the detail and in the methods of control.

So that protection of the environment is taken care of in our farms, it is important that the latter should be economically viable. It is also important that the proposed measures should be clearly explained, reliable and open to control. These characteristics are far from simple: in fact they represent a veritable challenge.

2010, the year of biodiversity. To mark the importance given to these questions in the Walloon region, the visual which was chosen for this conference bears the picture of a type of agriculture which is more respectful of biodiversity and its habitats. The picture of the ladybird (famous for its qualities as a helper) also embodies the fact that agriculture may even find something of interest there.

The conference

This conference is an essential instrument of communication between the member States and communication between them and the departments of the Commission. It is all the more important as its conclusions are referred to the Council.

The regulations evolve in complexity and in sophistication. The difficulties in implementing them on the ground increase. This phenomenon is clearly felt through debates carried out during successive conferences, debates which become ever more specific and technical. We realise that it is more and more necessary to establish contacts with other member States of the Union. That is what we have been doing during these last two years and what we are going to develop further in the future. These contacts clearly lead to exchanges which generate ideas, allow for experiences to be shared, limit the difficulties on the ground, reduce implementation costs and can also save us from some difficulties when auditing takes place.

Within this outline, we have tried to arrange it so that this conference should be rich in instruction and a current set of themes provides its fair contribution to the effort of

everyone, in a spirit of collaboration with the departments of the Commission and the Court of Audit.

I hope that in this work you will find a certain interest and I wish you firstly, success in your work, and secondly an excellent stay in Wallonia.

Before starting work, we are going to have the pleasure of hearing from Mrs. Sabine Laruelle, Federal Minister for Small and Medium Businesses, Independents, and for Agriculture and Scientific Policy, who is here now. I hand you over to her.